

Remarks to a Gathering for Peace in Armagh, Northern Ireland September 3, 1998

Thank you. Thank you for the wonderful welcome. I am very, very proud to be the first American President to visit Armagh. Thank you for making Hillary and me feel so welcome tonight.

I thank Mayor Turner; my good friend Prime Minister Blair, who will speak in a moment. I thank First Minister Trimble and First Deputy Minister Seamus Mallon for their remarks and their leadership, the role-modeling they are doing by working together for a peace for all the people of Northern Ireland. I think we should give them both a big hand for that. *[Applause]* I thank them.

There are other members of the Assembly here tonight who represent surrounding areas, Paul Berry, Danny Kennedy, Pat McNamee, Conor Murphy, John Fee. We thank them for their service in Northern Ireland's new Assembly, the hope for its peaceful future.

I also would like to say a special word of appreciation to the remarkable young woman who introduced me, Sharon Haughey. I'll never forget the letter she wrote me in 1995. A 14-year-old girl, in the midst of all this violence, said "Both sides have been hurt. Both sides will have to forgive." It was so simple, so profound, that I quoted it when I came here 3 years ago. Well, she's grown up to be quite an impressive young 17-year-old, and I was very honored to have her here tonight as the symbol of what Northern Ireland can become if you put away war and take up peace forever. Thank you, Sharon.

I'd like to thank the wonderful choir who sang for us a few moments ago. I would like to thank the members of our delegation, the Secretaries of Education and Commerce, and 12 Members of the United States Congress from both parties, for coming here.

You know, many United States Presidents' ancestors actually came to America from Northern Ireland. Andrew Jackson's father was from Cerrick Fergis in County Antrim. Woodrow Wilson's grandfather left Dergalt in County Tyrone. My ancestors were so humble, everyone knows they came from somewhere in Northern Ireland, and no one is quite sure where. *[Laughter]* Most believe the 18th century Cassadys, my mother's

people, were from County Fermanagh. Most believe that those people were my forebears, and I have a painted watercolor of an 18th century farmhouse on our wall at the White House to prove it. The truth is, I can't be sure, so I'll save all the genealogists a lot of trouble by saying, wherever I am tonight, it is good to be home in Northern Ireland.

I am especially proud to be here with my wife at this important time. Yesterday she spoke to the Vital Voices conference, hundreds of women from Northern Ireland, working across all the lines that divide you, for a better future. Tonight we are proud to be in a place that is a spiritual home to Irish people of both religious traditions and to millions of Irish-Americans as well.

Armagh is a city on a hill in every sense. Your faith and tolerance are making a new era of peace possible. For yourselves and all the world, in every act of genuine reconciliation, you renew confidence that decency can triumph over hatred. You have inspired the rest of us to aim a little higher. I thank you, and America thanks you for the precious gift you give us all, a gift of hope redeemed and faith restored.

Indeed, I am tempted in this city of saints and cathedrals to call the peace of 1998 a miracle. After all, it was delivered through the agency of that good American angel, Senator George Mitchell, who is here. It was delivered on Good Friday.

Nonetheless, I think you would all agree that, at least in the normal sense in which we use the word, the peace of Good Friday was not a miracle. You did it yourselves. It rose from the public's passionate demand to take a different course. It came about from the hard work of leaders like those who are on this stage, from David Trimble and Seamus Mallon, from the leaders of the other parties, from Tony Blair and the Irish Prime Minister, as well. It came from honest debate. And again, it came loud and clear from an overwhelming vote of the people for peace. It is you who have told your leaders that you long for peace as never before. You gave them the confidence to move forward, to give up the past, and speak the language of the future.

Armagh has stood for these better aspirations throughout its long history. If there is a recurring theme to this seat of learning and religion, it is the largeness of the human spirit. Here, a Briton, Saint Patrick, devoted himself to the cause of Ireland and left a legacy of faith and compassion. Here, the Book of Armagh preserved his gentle message and the power of the gospels.

Today, the two cathedrals that dominate the landscape stand for the idea that communion is better than destructive competition. Two proud traditions can exist side by side, bringing people closer to God and closer to each other. I salute the leadership of Dr. Sean Brady and Dr. Robin Eames, the Archbishops of the Catholic and the Church of Ireland dioceses, respectively. For years they have walked together when it counted. I salute the Presbyterians and the Methodists who have worked hard for peace, indeed, the men and women of all denominations.

Here, there have been difficulties, as elsewhere, but the historic streets of this old town remind us of a fundamental fact about your community: Armagh literally encircles its many traditions in a single community. That is what Northern Ireland must do if you want the future of peace and prosperity that belongs to the children in this crowd tonight.

As you look ahead, to be sure, in this peace process, there will be false steps and disappointments. The question is not if the peace will be challenged; you know it will. The question is, how will you respond when it is challenged? You don't have to look too far. The bomb that tore at the heart of Omagh was a blatant attack on all of Northern Ireland's people who support peace.

The Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair and Hillary and I just came from Omagh. We met with the families whose innocents were slaughtered. We met with those who were terribly wounded. We saw children scarred, some of them for life, because of the madness that, if someone could just set off a big enough bomb and kill enough Protestants and Catholics, kill enough men, women, and children, including two pregnant women, kill enough people from Northern Ireland, Ireland, and foreign countries, that maybe everybody would walk away from peace.

But it backfired. Out of the unimaginably horrible agony of Omagh, the people said, "It is

high time somebody told these people that we are through with hate, through with war, through with destruction. It will not work anymore."

Think of what it will be like when everyone forever can simply walk freely through Armagh with no anxiety about what street you walk down or with whom you talk. Think how beautiful this city can be without any barbed wire and never a thought of a burned church. Peace brings peace of mind and prosperity and new friends eager to see this historic and compelling land for the first time. People once were afraid to come to Armagh and Northern Ireland. Now they will be hard pressed to stay away.

We wanted to come here in person to thank you, to thank you for the peace, to thank you for strengthening the hand of everyone, everyone anywhere who is working to make the world a little better.

When I go now to other troubled places, I point to you as proof that peace is not an idle daydream, for your peace is real, and it resonates around the world. It echoes in the ears of people hungry for the end of strife in their own country. Now, when I meet Palestinians and Israelis, I can say, "Don't tell me it's impossible. Look at Northern Ireland." When I meet Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, I can say, "Don't tell me it's impossible. Look at Northern Ireland." When I hear what the Indians and Pakistanis say about each other over their religious differences, I say, "Don't tell me you can't work this out. Look at Northern Ireland." Centuries were put to bed, and a new day has dawned. Thank you for that gift to the world.

And never underestimate the impact you can have on the world. The great English poet and clergyman, John Donne, wrote those famous lines: "No man is an island. We are all a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Tonight we might even say, in this interconnected world, not even an island, not even a very unique island, not even Ireland is fully an island.

On this island, Northern Ireland obviously is connected in ways to the Republic, as well as to England, Scotland, and Wales, and in ways, the Republic of Ireland is connected to them also. All of you on this island increasingly are connected to Europe and to the rest of the world, as ideas and information and people fly across the globe at record speeds. We are tied ever closer together, and we have obligations

now that we cannot shirk, to stand for the cause of human dignity everywhere.

To continue John Donne's beautiful metaphor, when the bells of Armagh toll, they ring out not just to the Irish of Protestant and Catholic traditions. They ring out to people everywhere in the world who long for peace and freedom and dignity. That is your gift.

We Americans will do what we can to support the peace, to support economic projects, to support education projects. Tomorrow the Secretary of Education will announce a cooperative effort here to help children bring peace by doing cross-community civic projects. We know we have an obligation to you because your ancestors were such a source of strength in America's early history. Because their descendants are building America's future today, because of all that, we have not forgotten our debt to Ulster. But we really owe an obligation to you because none of us are islands; we are all now a part of the main.

Three years ago I pledged that if you chose peace, America would walk with you. You made the choice, and America will honor its pledge.

Thank you for the springtime of hope you have given the world. Thank you for reminding

us of one of life's most important lessons, that it is never too late for a new beginning. And remember, you will be tested again and again, but a God of grace has given you a new beginning. Now you must make the most of it, mindful of President Kennedy's adage that "Here on Earth, God's work must truly be our own."

Your work is the world's work. And everywhere, in every corner, there are people who long to believe in our better selves, who want to be able to say for the rest of their lives, in the face of any act of madness born of hatred over religious, or racial, or ethnic or tribal differences, they want to be able to shake their fists in defiance and say, "Do not tell me it has to be this way. Look at Northern Ireland."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. at the Mall of Armagh. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Robert Turner; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and his wife, Cherie; First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the Northern Ireland Assembly; former Senator George J. Mitchell, independent chairman of the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in Dublin

September 4, 1998

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman's Remarks

Q. Mr. President, do you have any comments on Senator Lieberman's remarks?

The President. I've been briefed on them, and basically I agree with what he said. I've already said that I made a bad mistake, it was indefensible, and I'm sorry about it. So I have nothing else to say except that I can't disagree with anyone else who wants to be critical of what I have already acknowledged was indefensible.

Q. Do you think the Senate is the right format for—

The President. That's not for me to say. That's not for me to say. I don't—I've known Senator Lieberman a long time. We've worked together on a lot of things. And I'm not going to get into commenting on that, one way or the other.

That's not—it wouldn't be an appropriate thing for me to do.

Q. But do you think it's helpful for him to make that kind of—

The President. It's not for me to say. But there's nothing that he or anyone else could say in a personally critical way that I—that I don't imagine that I would disagree with, since I have already said it myself, to myself. And I'm very sorry about it. There's nothing else I could say.

Q. Mr. President, do you think an official censure by the Senate would be inappropriate?

The President. I just don't want to comment on that. I shouldn't be commenting on that while I'm on this trip, and I don't think that—my understanding is that was not a decision that was made or advocated clearly yesterday.